

The last dinosaur's roar

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Warning! Deathly Hallows spoilers!

The sequence is always the same.

The moment I apparate in, a suffocating wave of heat and smoke washes over my face. The burning visage of my home blurs into a red haze, as hot tears fill my eyes and fear grips my heart. I feel as if an invisible spoon had carved out the contest of my stomach, leaving nothing but cold lead in its place.

A single thought dances through my mind. They've found us.

My old instincts kick in and, even as my heart tries to jump out through my chest, a cold analytical part of my mind jolts my frozen body into motion. I stumble through the ruins of my house like a drunken man, tramping through blasted doors and numbly passing my fingers over bullet-hole ridden walls.

When I finally find her, a cold sense of numbness envelopes my entire being. She's lying there spread-eagled, still as beautiful as the day when I proposed her; the only thing marring her face a small bullet wound on her forehead.

I feel the bile rising up my throat and my knees buckle, itching to bring me down closer to my love and leave me there forever, by her side where I belong. But then, I remember the kids and force myself to stand up, to be strong and keep looking, feeling both hopeful and fearful of what else I'd find.

Maybe she had the time to send them away. Maybe they weren't here when it happened.

I let wild, unreasonable hope fill me up, adding spring into my steps.

But then, I find them; all three of them, bundled together in a pool of their own blood. James and Albus' young ruined bodies are slumped protectively over Lily, the two brothers having looked out for their little sister until their dying breaths.

Something breaks inside of me and my legs finally give up. With an anguished roar, I fall into the pool of my family's blood and cradle my dead children in my shaking hands. Like in a dream, I press their cold shredded bodies against my chest, wishing with all my despair and misery that I could give my life in exchange for theirs.

And then I wake up.

Once again, I find myself drenched in cold sweat, hugging a pillow instead of my dead family. I clench my eyes shut and desperately try to grasp the remnants of the fading dream, craving to stay with my wife and children for a little while longer, to feel them in my arms just one more time. But the pillow is a poor substitute for family and the reality mercilessly sinks in.

They are dead. My wife, my kids, my friends; the entire world I've worked so hard to save and rebuild. All gone. Millions of witches and wizards, thousands of years of history - all destroyed in a few short years, by fear, prejudice and jealousy.

The world left behind has nothing to offer me. It is a lonely and sad place, a cold technological wasteland devoid of all the things I've ever considered important and sacred. Its emptiness infests me, spreads through me like a disease, whispering words of defeatism and melancholy into my ear.

Is there really a point in getting up from bed at all? In trudging through yet another dreary day of this pointless existence? In stubbornly

waging on this long lost war, fruitlessly trying to bring back to life an outmoded and crushed branch of evolution I'm a part of?

Oh, it'd be so easy to just slit my wrists and end this futile half-existence, to finally be reunited with my family, for eternity. My breath hitches and my entire being throbs with longing at that thought. Just a little cut and this torture could be over.

But even as I contemplate suicide for what feels like million and the first time, I know I won't do it, just as I hadn't done in any of the previous million occasions. It's like there's something in my very essence, in the bare fact of being Harry Potter, that just refuses to give up; a foolish, stubborn, often delusional spirit, that just keeps struggling on, even when the all hope seems lost and defeat is at hand.

So I take a deep breath. And another. After a few more, my breathing steadies. Fresh oxygen ensures my tortured heart will keep beating for a little while longer. With an effort of will, I wrench my mind out of the pits of depression, away from the dead faces that only bring longing and despair. And as always, with nothing else worthy to grasp for, my thoughts inexorably drift towards the only thing I have left in this world - revenge.

Images of my archenemies start flashing before my eyes. Satan-Hunters, they call themselves; the Faith Enforcement's cruelest zealots. They are the muggle filth responsible for the deaths of my family five years ago, as well as many other atrocities against my brethren. All of a sudden, I see Ginny's and the kids' mangled bodies in a new light - not as a tragedy on its own, but as a product of their treachery, malice and hate. Again, my body starts quivering, except this time not with anguish and grief, but out of anger and hate.

An old me would have been horrified; always so damn proud of his own pureness, so full of moral superiority and carefully concealed smugness.

But him is not me; at least not anymore.

I open wide the doors of my heart and welcome these feelings like old friends that they are. I invite them in and let them wash through my entire being, their cleansing fire burning off the last remnants of self-pity and doubt clouding my mind. With red hot hatred burning in my veins and cold rage simmering in my stomach, I feel a sickening sort of reprieve when darkness finally rises up and fills that empty cavity where my soul used to be. My fingers clench compulsively as I mentally burrow them through the child-killers' beady little eyes and into their filthy bigoted brains, slowly squeezing the life out of them just as they'd done with me.

I look down and find myself strangling the same pillow I was trying to hug a few moments ago. Even though I find this replacement equally unfulfilling, there's still a twisted sort of smirk dawning on my face. This time, the real thing isn't quite as unreachable as my dead family.

I'll make them pay even if it's the last thing I do.

My daily vow.

It's the traditional ending of the self-motivational ritual that has kept me going for the last several years. With lust for revenge coursing through my veins, I had found the willpower to keep scuttling from one shelter to the next, even when others had lost all hope and threw themselves at the mercy of the Church. With this one clear purpose in my mind, I had found the strength to survive in this brave new world, where using magic without technology is a crime above all others.

The old Harry Potter couldn't have functioned without his friends and family by his side. The old Harry Potter had to go, one way or the other. In the end, it was simply the choice between a razorblade and this empty hate-filled half-existence.

Have I made a wrong choice?

Honestly, I stopped caring for that a long time ago. I no longer have use for confusion and self-doubt; they won't help me blow up a Faith Enforcement's brainwashing camp or wrench some precious textbook out of the Church's 'Satan-lore' museums. The only thing I care about, the one purpose I have left is to make it even; get back to the

mudblood fuckers who had destroyed everything I was and would have ever been.

And just the other day, I think I've finally found the perfect way to do it.

But first, there are chores to be done. I finally get out of the bed and stumble to the bathroom, where I perform the most basic toiletries. Back when I still cared for myself, I never realized how much work went into the upkeep of human body. It used to come natural, but now I feel like some grotesque alien infiltrator, forcing myself into the role of a normal human being - the role I'm no longer suited for.

Regardless, I brush on, rinse and repeat. Making myself presentable means fitting in. And fitting in is paramount for survival in this crazy technological nightmare, filled with paranoia and fundamentalism.

Once I'm out of the toilet, my eyes take a quick inventory of the room. It's not much to look at, really - just a cheap room in a cheap hotel, all a part of a cheap lifestyle. Faith Enforcement's constant monitoring of 'divinergy misuses' makes ready cash rather hard to come by. An empty bottle of scotch is standing next to an ashtray overflowing with cigar buts. With corrective lung therapies, cigars are back in trend; not that I'd care either way. Piles of papers, runic charts and forbidden 'satanlore' books are strewn all around the room. I haven't been here long, but it certainly feels like it. After a while, one cheap hotel room starts to look like all the others.

I quickly dress in muggle garb - robes being a long forgotten luxury - and approach the nightstand. There I find the most important items in the room - a divinergy gun and the Elder wand lying side by side, right next to the mandatory bible and a small crucifix on a chain. Wand goes in the right holster and the gun in the left. Sometimes it pays to use the muggle thingamajig instead of real magic - it falls under jurisdiction of an entirely different division of law enforcement, ill equipped to deal with a 'soultrader' like myself. Next, I pick up the crucifix necklace and put it around my neck, while the bible goes into my pocket. While not yet illegal, it is ill-advised to be caught without symbols of piety on one's person. It only takes one anonymous tipoff to be declared a suspected heathen and brought in for questioning.

I look my dressed form in the mirror and take a deep breath. Today is the day I start working on my theory. My stomach is tingling with nervous energy and the beginnings of actual hope. The idea is wild, untested and totally off the left field, but then again, when has something I've done been anything but?

With a heavy heart I acknowledge this will not bring back my family; even with Resurrection Stone, I know they are gone for good. But there are others who had suffered, the entire race that is on the brink of extinction. If I could give my kind another chance, just one last chance for greatness, I'll die a happy man, knowing my vengeance had been carried out.

So I sit down at the table and start sorting through the mess of equations, runic maps and arcane texts. Even with a basic idea formed in my mind, there's still some footwork to be covered. I'll have to be extra careful with whatever conclusions I come up with; my knowledge of Arithmancy and Runes is amateurish at best, learned out of necessity rather than some real interest.

At times like this, I really miss good old Hermione. Books and research had always been her strongest suit. I bet she would have sorted through all this junk in no time.

But like many others, she's long gone - one of the first to perish, along with my family. And I'm still here, alone and on my own.

I suppress a sudden pang of longing with a splash of righteous anger and indignation at my friend's traitorous death.

Don't you worry, 'Mione, I'll get there. Maybe not as quickly and neatly you would have, but I'll manage. I'll make you proud. And I'll make them pay.

After all, what else do I have left but time?

Three days later, I find myself in the town of my birth, standing before the grave of one Kendra Dumbledore.

The result of almost 50 hours of restless brain-wrecking work and frustration is clear - this is where it all must come down; one final throw of dice, with the future of wizarding world at stake.

It almost feels unreal that it's been only three days since I first started working on this project. I expected it would take me much longer to untangle that mess of arcane formulas and conjectures. The much dreaded calculations actually turned out much simpler than I had feared.

But then again, I of all people should have known better than to expect some great complexity behind the unprecedented feat I'm trying to pull. Powerful magic doesn't like to be tied down by equations and formulas, like something mundane and comprehensible. Magic wants, it craves to be free, to play by no one's rules but its own. If my experience has taught me anything, it's that magic will always turn against those who try to control it, and favor those who treat it with respect and awe it deserves. Truly great magical feats depend much more on the wizard's instinctive feel of magic's tempers and moods, rather than some formulistic incantations and recipes.

This is something that Voldemort and these silly muggles, with their '11-dimensional space theory' and 'nano-technological binding of divinergy', never truly understood and never will.

Consequently, this is something that I understand all too well.

I know I'm not much of a wizard when measured by complex spells I can perform or theories I can recite. But when it comes to screwy stuff like this... this is when I truly shine. Akin to flying, deciphering magic's quirks and whims comes almost naturally to me, like something I've always known and just need to remember.

I'll need one hell of a remembering spree if I'm to pull this off right.

Therefore, with forced meticulousness, I start taking out of my duffle bag the items I'll need for tonight's 'experiment': my invisibility cloak; the Resurrection Stone; Gryffindor's sword; the Elder wand from my holster; and the final ingredient, acquired during last week's raid and

the one that gave me this idea in the first place - an old, battered time turner.

I stand back and watch the displayed objects with some satisfaction. I almost smile at the ridiculousness of the situation; this is about where my careful calculations end and 'winging it by instinct' begins.

I slowly move my fingers over the displayed items, wondering which one to use first.

Finally, I grab for the Invisibility cloak and spread it on the grass before the mossy grave, like on some macabre picnic.

The time turner comes next. I spend a long minute or two just twiddling with the little hourglass in my hands, making sure I'm right about this before I do anything that can't be reversed. Finally, I tap the top compartment against the headstone, breaking it open. With almost artistic delicacy, I spill the time sand over the cloak, forming a rough outline of the arcane clairvoyance rune I had found during my research.

I stop for a moment to inspect my handiwork with a critical eye. My gut tells me it feels right.

In a flash of insight, I wonder if this was how Snape felt while diddling with his potions. 'Subtle art and exact science', was it? I finally understand why he was always so pissed off when we just followed the printed instructions, failing to notice subtle qualities and connections that were probably obvious to him. Too bad my talent in arcane magic wasn't as marketable as Snape's potion brewing; I could have left a deeper mark in the years following Voldemort's defeat - not that it'd have mattered in the long run.

Images of ransacked Hogwarts, my burning home and murdered family flash before my eyes. I quickly turn my attention back to the task at hand. Occupying my mind with practical matters has proven to be the best way to keep my depression at bay.

Instincts lead my hand to the next item on the list - the Resurrection Stone. I spend a minute or two just caressing the black nugget in my

hand, thinking of all the conversations with my dead family it had given me. Sometimes, their kind words and support were the only thing that kept me from just giving up and letting myself be captured, like so many others.

I intuitively know that, after tonight, this last link to my family will be lost for good. My whole body trembles with the desire to turn the stone three times and see them again, just for one last time. But then, I remember our final conversation and Ginny's heartfelt plea to cease calling her. I remember my promise that I will stop using her and the kids as an emotional crutch in my daily life and learn to cope without them. With a heavy heart, I place the stone in the centre of the clairvoyance rune and wrench my hand away from it.

The stone's positioning feels good, but my heart is far from it.

I spend a long minute just staring at the Gryffindor's sword and Elder wand, trying to figure out how to mix these final two ingredients of the rough recipe in my mind.

Eventually, I settle for the wand. As the image of the final stages forms in my mind, I compulsively move the sword here and there, looking for the place where it'll be the easiest to grab. Once I'm satisfied, I take a deep breath and take off my clothes. It doesn't feel right that I should offer myself to magic with a layer of dead plants, animal skins and hardened larvae sludge around my body.

Finally, I deem myself ready. I take a deep breath, close my eyes and cast my thoughts to the person on whose grave I'm standing: haughty and strict Kendra Dumbledore, the muggleborn mother of Albus, Aberforth and Ariana Dumbledore, killed by her own daughter's accidental magic in the summer of 1862.

Keeping that image on the forefront of my mind, I start reciting a chant I've found in a half-completed manuscript of a long dead warlock. The elder wand starts pulsing with energy, its unique make amplifying my less than spectacular magic to insane proportions. A strange turquoise-blue field starts forming over the Invisibility Cloak.

On some level, I was aware that using all three Hallows together would unleash some powerful magic, but nothing could have prepared me for this. The gigantic beam of magic leading from the Elder wand to the glowing rune on the cloak is so strong, that I can barely hold on to the pulsating, overheating piece of wood in my hands. By the time my chant has reached its culmination, the air is so thick with energy that I have problems breathing.

I chance a nervous glance around me. The Divinergy Misuse Office has certainly detected a disturbance of this size. Faith Enforcement's zealots and Satan-Hunters are probably already on their way here.

Fortifying Kendra's image in my mind, I yell out the last two verses and the world around me explodes with torrents of light and arcane power. The Elder wand is yanked from my hands and sucked into the forming vortex of magical energy, but I don't care. My gut tells me everything is proceeding as it should.

Slowly, as if in a dream, a tall female figure starts emerging from the whirlpool before me. Her avatar looks like a turquoise variety of the Resurrection Stone's standard creation, but my gut tells me there's more to it than a simple colour change. It's like there's an intangible depth in the specter's transparent visage, strands of its essence stretching into dimensions of time and space that my primitive senses can only glimpse.

Inexorably, my attention is drawn to the woman's rigidly sharp features and piercing dark eyes. Kendra Dumbledore looks back at me slightly disapprovingly, but there's neither surprise nor anger on her face.

"Kendra Dumbledore?" I ask needlessly.

"Harry Potter," she retorts flatly.

My heart rate increases as I bend over and take the Gryffindor sword from the ground next to my feet. I twirl it reluctantly in my hands, well aware that Faith Enforcement troops are only seconds away.

“You’re not even going to try and stop me?” I ask Kendra, a bit unnerved by her serenity.

“Would it do me any good, summoner?” she raises an eyebrow patronizingly. I sense the strength of her character and can almost imagine her dressing down Albus and Aberforth with her sharp tongue and piercing glare.

“No, probably not,” I acknowledge, just as three full squads of Satan-Hunters appear around me with a crack specific for the muggle version of portkey.

“Sweet Jesus, it’s Harry Potter!”

“Potter? The Harry Potter!?”

“The Devil’s Chosen!”

“Lord, protect us!”

I almost smile at their gasps and exclamations. It seems some things never change, regardless of the time and the war I’m in.

“In the name of the God Almighty and His chosen hand on this mortal coil, I order you to surrender, soul-trader!” their commander yells out, sounding less than impressed by the legend I somehow always end up creating.

My eyes, however, stay locked with Kendra’s. I can feel she understands what I’ve chosen to do and my reasons for doing so, but I still feel the need to address her in some way, to defend my actions under her disapproving gaze.

“I’m sorry Kendra, but it’s for the greater good,” I end up telling her and then plunge the Gryffindor’s sword right through her ghostly heart.

“Fire!” the zealot commander yells at the same time.

With a thunderous explosion of several dozens divinergy and regular rifles firing at once, a hailstorm of bullets and energy beams rain

down on me from all directions. Each ray of compressed magic can disperse a standard Protego shield like dust in the wind. Each enchanted bullet can pierce through dragonhide armor like a hot knife through butter. But none of them come even near me, before they are enveloped in a torrent of turquoise magic, erupting from the sword's entry point.

I hear panicked shrieks of the muggle troopers, as they are blasted into the air, their precious toys useless against real magic, the kind of which only a true magical being can wield. But I don't care about them any longer. The only thing that matters now is the mighty vortex of magic spiraling through the ghostly specter before my eyes and swallowing it whole.

With a kind of morbid fascination, I watch as turquoise blaze inches up the highly conductive metal of the sword, before enveloping my entire body and throwing me into the same unstoppable current of chaotic magic that had already swallowed Kendra's apparition, the time sand and combined might of the Hallows. My mouth opens in a silent scream, as I feel my body losing its wholeness, breaking up into million pieces and joining into the same crazy carousel as some of the most potent magical ingredients on the face of the Earth.

Through my new strange senses, I feel the torrent's need - my need - to expand, to assimilate more magic into its - ours - chaotic structure. But we realize there is no more ground to conquer, no link to expand our tentacles through. Except... Once again, I feel that same sense of depth in the remnants of Kendra's avatar, of links leading to different times and places, some of which beyond mere mortals' ability to comprehend. However, one link is stronger than the others; it shines like a beacon in a suddenly perceivable spider web stretching all around us.

A part of me that is still Harry Potter suddenly realizes this is the link he's been trying to highlight with his ritual - the one connecting Kendra's avatar of today with Kendra of the time when she had died in a magical explosion comparable to the one I'm now a part of. Two similar events had created a tightrope across time and space, the kind of which wizardkind had never seen before. And as the newly

created magical entity that I'm a part of greedily latches to that tightrope, I realize I'm about to take one long walk over it.

What follows next is... simply put indescribable with words of any language that I know. My new senses sing to me songs of universes and atoms, of bacteria and foreign lifeforms, of completely random and often unrecognizable entities that are passing by me, through me and in several other indescribable dimensions removed from me. No other human being could possibly comprehend the wonders around me; they would simply lack the necessary senses to perceive the full picture I'm now a part of.

Suddenly, there's a strange yank on my soul and I realize the trip is over. Pieces of my body snap together, becoming discernible from the torrent of chaotic energy that slowly disperses around me. I feel myself falling down a never-ending dark well, away from the wondrous world of endless connections and possibilities.

And then, I find myself lying on a red carpet.

Every fiber of my being aches with pain, but also with longing for being a part of something larger than just another isolated human being. But with years of experience, I wrench my mind away from depressive avenues and force my two-dimensional ineffective eyes to inspect the world around me.

It is... just a room, really. Cheap wooden furniture, stone walls and lots of daylight pouring in through two windows. Or at least, that would have been the case, if everything wasn't scorched, broken, overturned or otherwise damaged by what appears to have been one mighty explosion - a recent one at that, as I can still feel aftershocks vibrating through the parched carpet underneath my back.

I twist my body to the right and spot a human figure slumped limply against the wall, her glassy eyes staring into the distance. My vision clears a bit and I notice a tickle of blood leading from the caved back of her skull, to a pool of red liquid slowly forming on the floor. I recognize the sharp features of Kendra Dumbledore. It doesn't take a genius to realize she is dead.

At this point, my ears clear up and I realize someone is screaming their throat out behind my back. I flap around like a stranded fish, ignoring the ache in my bones, and quickly pinpoint the source of the commotion: curled against the opposite wall, there's a thin, frail-looking girl with tousled fire-red hair. With her eyes shut and her hands hugging her knees, she's compulsively rocking back and forth, letting out a heart-wrenching wail of despair.

With a pang in my chest, I recognize Kendra's 14 year old daughter, Ariana. I also realize my plan has succeeded - I have travelled to the exact moment in time and space when the poor girl's accidental magic had killed her mother.

I want to howl out in victory, pat myself on the back and then sleep for about a week, but I know this is neither the time nor place for that. The year is 1862 - almost two centuries removed from everything I know. I have absolutely nothing to my name - no wand, no allies, not even a set of clothes on my back. And the worst of all, I'm in someone else's home, in the same room with a still warm murder victim and a hysterical half-crazy teenager crying for help.

“Ariana! Hold on, I’m coming!”

And by the sound of it, help is mere seconds away from bursting through the front door and finding me in a rather compromising position.

It’s in the moments like this that my second greatest talent comes into play - a cool head on my shoulders.

Time seems to slow down around me. Pain and exhaustion are ruthlessly suppressed, as I jump to my feet in one fluid motion. My eyes are darting around the room, taking in, analyzing and discarding every single aspect of it, looking for anything that could help me out. Suddenly, I find just the thing - poor Kendra’s wand, lying right next to her dead body. I push my magic to its breaking point and let out a sigh of relief when I feel the wand slamming into my expecting hand. I thank my lucky star that I forced myself to master a few wandless tricks when the Faith Enforcement started growing uncannily good at detecting wand magic.

And then, just as the front door is about to slam open, I whirl around and Disapparate.

It's ten minutes past eleven. Ariana is late for her morning walk in the backyard, which means today is Albus' turn to take her.

I am at my usual haunt, under an old oak facing the backyard. Itchy transfigured clothes are a constant irritation, but I merely scratch myself and stay put, content that my Invisibility Cloak will hide my constant jittering.

Ahh, what would I have done without my favorite Hallow? Paying a little visit to the Potters was the first thing I did after transfiguring some clothes on my back. It was sad really, the way my great-grandfather treated this precious artifact - keeping it on a coat hanger like some common robe. I bet he was more upset over those measly few galleons I'd pinched from a cupboard drawer, than the loss of a legendary Hallow he wasn't even aware he had.

Safely hidden beneath my new cloak, I set out on a task of familiarizing myself with this strange world I found myself in. For a solid week or so, I did little else but sneak around and observe people as they interacted with each other and simply lived their daily lives. Even though I kept telling myself I wasn't here for the sightseeing, I couldn't help but feel fascinated by the time I found myself in.

There is just something surreal in walking down a freshly cobbled street and meeting gentlemen with top hats and ladies wearing dresses so wide that they need metallic wireframes to support their weight. Or, on the other side of the spectrum, seeing a textile factory completely manned by preteen children, working 14 hours per day.

But it was the very atmosphere of this time that captivated me the most; an almost tangible scent of changes in the air. After centuries of stagnation and darkness, the entire muggle world was simply exploding with progress. When not talking about American Civil War, the newspapers were full of excited reports on improved civic liberties, scientific innovations and new frontiers to explore. Even the muggles

on the streets seemed to be filled with nervous energy and optimism, as if they couldn't wait to see what accomplishments their race would achieve next.

But even through my fascination, always in the back of my mind there was the awareness that this young vibrant world was actually a time bomb waiting to go off; an adorable curious puppy that would grow into a fierce carnivorous beast and consume everything in its path.

Visits to the magical enclaves served well to intensify this awareness. Hogwarts, Diagon Alley, even the Ministry of Magic were almost exactly as I remembered them. Sure, there was a passing fad here or a different mode of transportation there, but in its very core, it seemed the wizarding world had reached its zenith and decided to stay there.

I watched the smiling, unsuspecting faces of wizardfolk on the streets and I found myself disappointed by them; their egocentric conformism, the air of smug haughtiness in dealings with everyone but their own kind. So sure in their own dominance and place under the sun, that they won't even notice when their precious little world starts crashing down around them.

Blind fools! Do they think that closing their eyes will make the Earth stop spinning? Don't they feel the wind of change blowing through the Leaky Cauldron's rickety old door? Don't they see the first sparks of an inferno that will swallow them all?

Luckily, even in this lethargic self-absorbed wizarding society, there are those whose minds are flexible and brilliant enough to sense the upcoming danger; idealistic youngsters like Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald who are willing to do whatever it takes to break the deadlock that's threatening to drag their brethren down into the dumpster of history.

However, left by themselves, even these two whiz kids are destined to fail. One's temper and youthful insolence and the other's reluctance and misguided morality will clash, breaking up for good what could have been a legendary partnership that led the wizarding world into a new golden age.

This can't be allowed to happen, not this time.

At last, the back door of the house before me opens and a tall teenager with startling blue eyes and red hair leads Ariana into the fenced backyard. The boy whom I recognize as Albus Dumbledore smiles kindly at the sickly-looking girl and shows her off to the centre of the field, but otherwise seems much too preoccupied with the notes in his hands to pay his sister a great deal of attention.

Immediately, I feel for the mental connection in my mind and give it a firm yank. Behind me, a young shepherd with a straw hat looks up from his grazing animals and gives the girl an intense stare.

This is Ian Hargrave - a bit withdrawn but decent enough fellow when you get to know him. He lives alone in a modest adobe at the other side of Godric's Hallow. Normally, he would take his livestock to graze behind his house, but that pasture had burnt down in a freak fire two weeks ago. There are numerous other fields closer to his home, but my Imperius made sure he picks this one. It also made sure he's always around during Ariana's little walks, watching her every move with unusual intensity. When the time comes, all these little facts will come together like pieces of a mosaic, hopefully adding an ironclad plausibility to the drama I'm trying to create.

Suddenly, Albus looks up, his piercing blue eyes landing on Hargrave. After a tense moment, he simply waves to his neighbor distractedly, throws a quick glance at the trembling Ariana and turns back to his calculations.

I let out a sigh of relief. Brilliant or not, that boy's head is certainly stuck in the clouds. He hasn't even registered Hargrave's constant presence as suspicious, something his younger brother had picked right up. But he'll learn better, I'm positive; guilt after today will make sure that he does.

Satisfied that my voyeur thrall is safe from persecution for the time being, I decide it's time to start up the next stage of my plan. Slowly, I sneak all the way down to the fence. Then, when Albus' frown is particularly wrinkled in thought, I point Kendra's wand through the hem of my cloak and silently mouth "Imperio!"

The wand in my hand rebels against an unlawful owner, but enough power and expertise makes it comply in the end. Albus doesn't notice Ariana's sudden stiffening, before she relaxes with a blank look on her face. I gently caress the fragile new link in my mind, calming the girl down. Over the years, I've become quite an expert on Imperio; it was the curse that muggles took the longest to neutralize.

Then, I simply walk away to my spot under the oak and wait.

Soon enough, another young man shows up, excitedly waving his own set of papers. I recognize the tall blonde as Gellert Grindelwald, a frequent visitor to the Dumbledore estate. He and Albus start a heated debate, completely forgetting the confused shivering girl in the backyard. A minute later, the door opens again, revealing a boy who looks like a shrunken copy of Albus. For a moment, little Aberforth lingers at the doorframe, scowling down at the two prodigies. Then, the kid thunders right down to his older brother and starts yelling at him, not noticing Gellert's annoyed look.

Suddenly, I feel as if my heart has stopped beating. Have I miscalculated the timeframe? Am I about to witness all my plans going to waste? Damn it, I should have had at least another week!

But then, Aberforth simply scoffs at his stammering older brother, lifts up Ariana - who had in the meantime curled herself in a protective ball on the grass - and takes her back into the house.

I let out a deep sigh of relief. Apparently, I still have some time left before an argument similar to this one will turn into a tragedy, irreversibly ruining these two kids' budding partnership. From what I've seen, it seems that the tension that would ultimately lead to that faithful duel has already started building.

As Grindelwald restarts his argument with Albus, I order Hargrave to turn back to his sheep, making sure he appears disappointed. A minute later, two prodigies retreat into the house, still debating heatedly between themselves.

Again, I wait.

Kendra's wand is unresponsive, but I was still able to set up a decent set of spying charms around the house. In this time of peace, few people bother to place any sort of protective charms around their homes.

I listen as two whiz kids discuss theories that are, even after almost four decades of learning magic, still above my head. Aberforth is in his room, scribbling his summer homework. Ariana sits in the attic, rocking gently and muttering under her breath. With my Imperius inactive, she has reverted to her normal behavior.

Hours pass. Everything is warm and peaceful, but I can still feel an icy storm building up in my stomach. I know the time is drawing near.

Finally, Gellert reminds Albus they should get ready for their scheduled visit to the Department of Mysteries. I've been wondering when the less-absentminded genius will remember the time. Five days ago, Albus has finally given in to Grindelwald's pestering and used his wonder-boy status to get them a guided tour through the Department. That tour is due to start in half an hour. In fact, this is the main reason why I've chosen this day to make my move; it's one of the few instances when I know exactly when the capricious prodigy will leave the house and return.

Through the window, I see Albus knocking at the door of his brother's room, shuffling his feet nervously on the floor. I almost smile when Aberforth scowls at his brother's request and gives the taller boy what appears like a good dressing down. Eventually, judging by Albus' look of sheepish relief, I gather Aberforth has agreed to take care of Ariana for a few hours. At times, I wonder which of the two brothers is the older one.

After some fumbling with dress robes and brushing up on the subjects they plan to discuss with the Unspeakables, two friends are finally gone with twin cracks of apparition. From my spying, I know their tour will last exactly two hours.

An hour and a half later, I let out a tired sigh and stand up. The time has finally come.

I know I will not enjoy what comes next. I have no desire to cause pain to either the Dumbledore family, or the vibrant Muggle world that has fascinated me so much.

But then, images of Ginny's and the kids' dead faces flash before my eyes, and my stomach hardens against the queasiness rising up inside it. My daily vow for the past five years burns brightly in my heart. The distance and vivacity of this time might have taken the bite out of my nightmares and depression and partially lifted the weight of bitterness from my soul, but they haven't made me forget who I am and what I came here to do.

However fascinated I've become by these inventive bright-eyed muggles, the fact remains their descendants were still the ones who had murdered my family and everything I held dear. The Dumbledore brothers may live long and relatively happy lives, but that won't stop all the fruits of their labor from being lost a few short decades after their deaths. Sometimes, a few must be sacrificed for the good of the many. I find it ironic that Dumbledore himself was the one who taught me that.

I stop for a moment and almost chuckle at my pretentiousness. Here I am, once again; big bad Harry Potter out to save the world. One scarred, world-weary dinosaur howling in rage at the meteor that's on its way to wipe out everything he knows. Now I actually do chuckle and notice that my voice is all raspy from misuse. With a smile that feels foreign to my facial muscles, I wonder if the sore throat will make this old dinosaur's roar all the more fiercer.

Only one way to find out.

I give Ariana a mental command to get the show on the road. The crazy girl approaches the attic trapdoor and starts banging at it, screaming her head off. Aberforth is immediately by her side, holding her gently and shushing her up.

I make Ariana point out the small window. "Out."

“You want to go out, sis? Is that it?” I hear Aberforth’s hopeful voice. Since she had killed her mother, Ariana has regressed even deeper into her shell.

I make her nod. “Out! I want out!”

“Alright, calm down, I’ll take you.”

Aberforth takes her hand and gently leads her outside, through the back door.

I make sure no one is near the house and then order Ian Hargrave to move forward. I follow carefully behind him.

Dumbledores have a standard set of muggle repellent charms around their house. Luckily, even though he doesn’t know it, Ian is actually a squib, with enough magic not to be bothered by them. That’s one of the reasons why I’ve picked him in the first place.

Aberforth notices Hargrave’s approach and scowls slightly in his direction. Unlike his brother, he hasn’t failed to notice the muggle’s odd behavior around his sister.

“Hello Mr. Hargrave. What brings you here?” the boy nods stiffly, as we reach the fence.

I look Aberforth over and my heart quenches. Here’s a good kid, who to do what’s best for his family. I sympathize with that, I really do. But what Aberforth fails to understand is that his brother is not an ordinary person like he is. Albus is one in a million, a prodigy in every sense of that word. His mind is simply too brilliant to be constrained with the trivialities of daily life. He needs freedom, the space to prosper and grow into his full potential. And by burying him with guilt and obligations, Aberforth is all but making sure that doesn’t happen for a long time - longer than the revolution this world needs can wait. Something has to give, and alas, that something is this innocent 15-year-old kid standing before me.

With fierce determination pushing back my guilt, I give Ian the command. Without preamble, the squib pulls out of his vest the six-

shooter I've provided him with and puts a bullet straight through Aberforth's head. The boy's startling blue eyes widen for a moment, before they roll back and the kid collapses on the grass, dead.

There's a terrifying scream, as Ariana curls down into a fetal position. I immediately shut her up with a mental command, but her anguish spills elsewhere and suddenly, the air becomes thick with magic. I realize that Ariana's accidental magic is kicking in and quickly place a stabilizing spell on her - the same one her brothers are often forced to use.

I throw a nervous look around. My spying spells tell me a few neighbors had caught the gunshot and the scream, but that they are not coming in to investigate yet. They have obviously gotten used to the strange noises coming from the Dumbledore household.

I turn back to Ian and get a sudden urge to end it all here and now. But I know I don't have that luxury. What I need is a crime of hate and passion. What I have right now is a clean-cut execution. My soul cries with the knowledge that I'll need to commit a lot more atrocities before my job is done.

With a mental order, Ian jumps over the wooden fence and punches the quietly shivering girl. Satisfied that there's a thin trickle of blood pouring out of Ariana's nose, I make Ian pick her up and carry her over the fence.

Once they are out of the backyard, I direct them away from the house and over the pasture, towards a small grove. I glance quickly at my stolen pocket watch, noting that Albus will be back in ten minutes, and then follow swiftly behind my two thralls.

Everything is proceeding according to the plan, but that doesn't give me a shred of satisfaction. Looking back at the 15 year old kid's prone body, I suspect that after today, I'll have many new nightmares to replace the fading ones from my previous life.

Eventually, we reach the woods behind the pasture. I know what needs to happen next. I've been planning it for weeks - the perfect

way to make Albus 'see the light', as well as get rid of the 'baggage' holding him down. How foolish I was to disregard my own part, to forget that every trigger needs a willing finger.

I stand still for what seems like ages, my stomach twisting with self-disgust and dread. It seems that no amounts of cold logic or vengeful fury can push back the bile rising up my throat. But I know this needs to be done. One's girl's innocence for the future of the world. Why doesn't the trade feel as fair as it sounds?

Detachedly, almost like in a dream, I give Ian the command. He fights back fiercer than ever before, but his defiance is futile against my experience and magic.

Mechanically but inexorably, my thrall tears away Ariana's clothes, unbuckles his pants and strands the poor girl. I stand above them stock-still, fighting with all my willpower against the urge to put a stop to the atrocity unfolding before my eyes. I force myself to watch all the way through, until my eyes feel like bleeding and my soul shriveling from the self-loathing bubbling in my guts. This is my doing, my plan, my crime. I refuse to shrink away from the responsibility for my actions. I only hope that my loved ones on the other side will understand that everything I have done was for the greater good.

After what feels like an eternity of torture, my thrall is finally done. It's all I can do not to throw up when I see lifeless, broken looks in Ariana's and Ian's eyes, as they wait for my next command.

A shout from the direction of the house draws my attention to the present. I know I don't have much time left.

With almost careless disregard, I issue my next set of commands to Hargrave. I don't think anything I do to these poor people now could top what I've just done.

I feel almost relieved when Ian pulls out a huge hunting knife and cuts the catatonic girl's throat. A quick and relatively painless death was the least I could give her, especially after the hell I - and the life itself - had put her through. I smile bitterly at my own rationalization; I know I'll be making up a lot of such excuses in the years to come.

But even though the little Ariana's suffering is over, Ian and I have a few more steps to go. I need to make sure that Albus doesn't limit his anger on Ian Hargrave alone, and see this as some sort of personal attack. I want him to expand his ire on the muggles as a group, shredding away his unproductive principles and concerns. So far, Albus has been treating muggles the way most 'light-oriented' wizards do - as harmless wizard-like animals, that mingle around mighty wizards' legs, making silly little toys that do stuff without magic. After today, I hope he'll for the first time see them the way they truly are - as his kind's competitors in the food chain, a threat that should be treated as such. Hopefully, Grindelwald will latch on to this opportunity and help steer this stubborn do-gooder into the correct frame of mind.

But first, I have my own part to play. Mentally confirming the last leg of my plan, I direct Ian into carving a large pentagram in the dead girl's chest. Once I'm satisfied that the bloody image looks satanic enough, I calmly order my thrall to stick the knife right through the middle of it. All the guilt and self-loathing must have overloaded my senses, as I feel completely numb while doing so. After murder and rape, I guess it's no wonder that desecration seems like a minor inconvenience at best.

"Ariana! Ariana!" I suddenly hear Albus' panicked call. I know the time has come for the grand finale of my play.

With a slight mental push, Hargrave pulls out his final weapon out of his waistcoat - a small bottle of arsenic-based weed-killer. My hope is that Albus himself will dispatch the murderer of his family, thus cementing his newly-formed attitude towards muggles. But just in case I'm wrong, I need to make sure that Hargrave doesn't live to be interrogated by someone who might detect signs of Imperius.

Ian offers surprisingly little resistance as I make him drink up the poison and drop the bottle where it can easily be found. I swallow my guilt when I realize his spirit must be completely crushed by what I made him do.

“Just a little longer and it’ll all be over,” I whisper gently through the link, but there is no need; the poor man is immersed in absolute serenity and acceptance, offering no resistance whatsoever to my commands. I wonder if this was how Christian suicide bombers felt, back in the early days of the war, before muggles figured out more effective ways to counter magic.

From the corner of my eye, I spot Albus running over the pasture, following a glowing pointer on the tip of his wand. As I suspected, it didn’t take him long to detect the trail of Ariana’s blood I left for him to find. Grindelwald is right behind his friend, looking very much like an avenging angel, what with his flowing golden hair and shining white mantle fluttering in the breeze.

I check my link with Hargrave and notice there’s already a slight spiking of pain in his stomach. 60 grams of pure arsenic is enough to topple a grown man. The solution I’ve given him is much more potent. I doubt the poor fellow will last more than a couple of minutes. With a mental shrug, I figure he might as well go out with a bang.

Pulling out his revolver, Ian stumbles out of the cover of the trees. “Die heathen! May the devil reclaim your wretched black souls!” I make my thrall scream, as he fires three bullets at the approaching wizards. Who would have thought that listening to all those fanatics screaming at me would one day come in handy?

Of course, only the first bullet whizzes over Albus’ and Gellert’s heads unchecked. The other two are easily repelled by their wandless deflection fields. A bit cocky, I gather, but then again, these kids haven’t experienced the horror of divinergy-infused bullets. If all goes according to the plan, they hopefully never will.

“Hargrave?” Albus stops for a moment, looking completely flabbergasted that such a mundane part of decor could be involved with anything happening to him. “Ian, why... What have you done... Where is my sister!?”

“She’s right here, fiend! I gave that filthy witch what she deserved!” I make him fire another bullet for the effect. “I gave her what all you wretched devil worshipers deserve!”

Albus doesn't even notice as the bullet pings off his shield. "What she deserved... No! Ariana!"

I visibly flinch under a sudden onslaught of half-controlled accidental magic, and instinctively take a few steps away, making sure I'm well hidden underneath my cloak. I look through the trees and see Albus zooming over the field on a beam of wild magic, Grindelwald using a spell to follow close behind him.

Ian just manages to fire off his last futile bullet, before he's swept off in the blast of Dumbledore's arrival. Next moment, he's pinned against a tree, a grim-faced Gellert holding him at wand point. Albus, for his part, stumbles a few drunken steps, before he falls sobbing over the naked ruined body of his baby sister.

Grindelwald throws Albus a sympathetic look, before he turns to my restrained thrall. "Vot you did vos very foolish, my simple-blooded friend. I assure you, dere vill be repercussions."

"Do your worst, devil!" I make Ian scream fanatically, spittle and blood flying from his mouth. "I'm already on my way to the place where even your wretched kind can't touch me!"

"Blind ignorance vill be your undoing, muggle. It may surprise you that ve, of the gifted blood, have ways of extending our reach even into the realm of death. Oh yes, one vay or another, my good friend Albus vill have his revenge. You can count on dat," Grindelwald retorts in his cultured Germanic voice.

I make a mental note to pinch the Resurrection Stone the first chance I get. I know dead souls can't give new information to the living ones, but why take the chance?

Albus must have heard the last retort, as he gently covers Ariana's body with his cloak and slowly stands up. I've never seen my gentle headmaster like this - his pale face contorted with loathing, his fisted hands quivering with barely restrained rage.

Grindelwald quietly steps away, as Albus approaches the dying muggle, his normally kind blue eyes flashing with frosty electric fire. He asks only one question. "Why?"

"Why? You dare ask me why?" Ian chokes on the blood pouring from his mouth. "It's because of what you are, sorcerer! You and your brother and that filthy whore - all of you, selling out your eternal souls for shreds of unholy power, polluting our community with your pagan rituals and devil worship-"

His rant is lost in a coughing fit that even Imperius couldn't prevent. I know my thrall doesn't have much time left. This is the best chance I'll get to push Albus beyond the edge. I must act now!

"But I got you good, didn't I? No devilish trickery could have saved your Satan-loving brother from the hand of God. And as for your wicked little sister..." I make sure that Hargrave's rotten teeth are visible through his lecherous sneer. "I took my time with that bitch. I pounded the evil out her, until she was crying our Lord's name, begging for forgiveness."

As I make Ian lick his bloodied lips lasciviously, I feel disgusted, but that's nothing compared to the look on Albus' face. Just another little push...

"Oh yes. I cleansed that filthy little whore hard and good, just before I slit her-"

"Crucio!"

I allow myself a quiet sigh of relief. It's done; this filthy, disgusting business is finally over. I've accomplished everything I set out to do, but I feel no joy or fulfillment; only self-loathing and guilt.

Still, even if my heart disagrees, the logical part of my mind knows that what the destruction of Dumbledore family was necessary, if Albus was to be given a chance to grow.

Creation and destruction; two sides of the same coin. Sometimes, one is needed, if only to inspire the other.

Right now, I'm standing at the site of a fierce forest fire. Trees, grass, animals, everything seems bleak and irreversibly ruined. But give it a year or two, and new life will start sprouting from the ashes; a life greener and more virile than ever before. I desperately hold on to the belief that the darker, more determined Dumbledore who will emerge from the wreck of the old one will be what this world needs to make itself a better future than the one I had witnessed.

After two minutes under the curse, Ian Hargrave finally ceases thrashing.

After another two minutes, Gellert steps in and gently lowers Dumbledore's wand hand, thus ending the curse.

Seeing what he's done, the full blow of today's events finally come crashing down on Dumbledore. He falls lifelessly on his knees, staring at the tortured corpse before him with empty, defeated eyes.

He doesn't even notices when Grindelwald gently removes the wand from his hands and erases its spell history. Then, with smoothness that speaks of experience, he deletes the traces of dark magic from Ian's corpse and cocoons Ariana's body in conjured sheets. Finally, he gently lifts Albus to his legs and steers him back towards the house, where magical authorities are already converging around Aberforth's body.

As two friends shuffle away from the crime scene, Ariana's cocooned body hovering behind them, I allow a bitter smile to cross my face when I notice Gellert's sympathetic manner and Albus' reliance on his friend's support. I know that their friendship is now stronger than ever, forged in the fire of a mutual tragedy.

I'm sure Dumbledore will retreat into a shell for a while, but I'm also confident that his curiosity and insatiable thirst to leave his mark on the world will eventually drag him out of the upcoming depression. And once that happens, he'll finally be free to join his newfound best friend on the quest to change the world.

Of course, even as I silently congratulate myself on the job well done, I'm well aware this was but a first step on the long road ahead of me. However close Dumbledore and Grindelwald appear now, a partnership between two egoistical power-hungry kids like them is a recipe for trouble. Oh yes, I sincerely doubt this was the last time I'll be forced to pull the chestnuts out of fire.

The wonder-duo's attitude towards muggles will need some adjustment too. I don't think they yet fully appreciate the seriousness of the threat that muggle technology could pose to the wizarding world. Maybe a well-organized wizard-hunting sect will change their minds? And who better to lead such an organization than another wizard, one well-versed with terrorism and lacking any roots in wizarding communities that could be used to track him down.

Muggles themselves might require an intervention or two. So many troubles for the wizardkind could be avoided if only the South won the American Civil War, or Bismarck failed to unite Germany, or if something were to happen to innovators such as Alfred Nobel, Thomas Alva Edison or Nikola Tesla.

And finally, there's the problem of Gellert's own mentality. However firmly Dumbledore was rooted in the Light, that's how deeply Grindelwald is immersed in the Dark Arts. That kid is simply too interested in power for power's sake, instead of seeing it as a tool that could help him achieve his other goals. Dumbledore has already had his corrective surgery. Grindelwald will soon need one of his own. Maybe a magical accident that will make his soul allergic to the darkest of magics? Or even better, a stray Necromancer could resurrect his entire family. What better way to teach someone the dangers of meddling with death, than to have their own zombified family deliver the lesson?

So yes, I knew all along that this mission was a life-long marriage, rather than a one-night stand. The work that awaits me will be difficult, oftentimes fruitless and never recognized or appreciated. Possibility of discovery by my increasingly capable pawns will be a constant danger. And even if my every plan succeeds flawlessly, all I have to look forward to is a sad, empty life of obscurity and a lonely un-

mourned death. Just a nameless dead codger, with a precious invisibility cloak wrapped around his shriveled old body.

But even as these thoughts pass through my head, I know they won't scare me away from the mission ahead of me. I'm more than willing to sacrifice others for the greater good; let no one say that I myself am unwilling to bear the same price.

I make a silent promise that, for as long as my back can support my cloak, I'll always be there, looking out for my two boys from the shadows of their brilliance. Sometimes a guardian angel, other times a punishing whip; one little push after another, I'll steer my two partners towards the bright destiny ahead of us.

Partners... I guess that's what we truly are. Three exceptional wizards, each in his own right, united over a common goal.

I smile at the imagery of my new trio.

The light one, hardened by harsh lessons of life. The dark one, cured from the temptation of wanting too much. And myself, the invisible guiding hand clearing up the path ahead.

The last three dinosaurs, howling against the fate of mighty and slow.

And our roar just might change the world.

Author notes

Alright, my first and probably the last (longer) post-DH story. Notice that I made sure everything mentioned here was in compliance with the crappy DH canon. I guess it was sort of a bigger challenge (not to throw up) that way.

The ending allows for the possibility of more chapters (I even hinted a few ideas near the end), but I have no intention of writing them (if you're interested in taking over, send me a PM).

Right now, I'll try to complete Yin & Yang (around 8K into the new chapter) and then move to Potter's Resistance (20K ATM - no, it's not abandoned; I'm just slow as a snail).

BTW, this one-shot hasn't been beta'd (if you want the job, send me a PM). Furthermore, this is my first story in 1st person POV, so you might wanna watch out from rampart tense screw-ups and other horrors of non-English writers.

EDIT: Forget the previous paragraph. The story has been beta'd by ZanyMuggle. There are some smaller grammar and spelling corrections, but the gist of the story remained the same.

o - Credits and acknowledgments

Many thanks to the crew at Alpha Fight Club. Special thanks to Jbern for giving me the idea about changing the future by 'removing' notable muggle scientists and such.

And of course, big cheers to ZanyMuggle for fixing up the grammar and spelling errors.

o - Sources and additional disclaimers

I did quite a bit of browsing while writing this story. I'm not saying I memorized each mentioned site, just that they helped me form a more complete picture of the various subjects I explored.

> 19th century England

<http://www.lkwdpl.org/lhs/england/>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Wmarriage.htm>

<http://www.memorialhall.mass.edu/activities/dressup/1860man.html>

<http://www.freeessays.cc/db/18/ehc33.shtml>

<http://www.theamazingchange.com/timeline.html>

<http://www.earlham.edu/pols/globalprobs/children/Laila.html>

> Christian views on witchcraft

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11197b.htm>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15674a.htm>

> Poisons

<http://www.chemistry.org/portal/a/c/s/1/featuretea.html?idc373e90097f810dd8f6a17245d830100>

> Germanic accent

<http://manu86.livejournal.com/25048.html>

And of course, for everything in between, there is the all-powerful Wikipedia.

> www.wikipedia.org

To access links, replace empty spaces (' ') with dots ('.').

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